

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER CONOVER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins our second oral history interview with Roger Conover, on May 11, 2022, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for joining me again. We wanted to discuss a little bit about some of the memories or thoughts that came to you after our first interview. Please go ahead.

Roger Conover: Shaun, good morning again. I just wanted to make an observation about how much the world has changed in many simple respects. I did mention in our first session that my dad did have a 1927 Pierce-Arrow, which in its day was a very nice car, but that car had no turn signals. As a matter of fact, I can remember my mother had to put her arm out the window. If she wanted to make a left turn, she put it straight out. If she wanted to go to the right, she'd bend it at ninety degrees. If she wanted to stop, she'd put her palm down. That was the way turn signals were done. This car had manual gear shifts. As a matter of fact, the gear shift lever was in the floor. It wasn't even on the steering wheel stem. So, that's the way the gear shift was. In the wintertime, there was no such thing as snow tires in those days, and I can remember my father getting these big chains out of the garage and going through the very difficult process of putting chains on the car to get up the driveway. [Editor's Note: The Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company, a motor vehicle manufacturer based in Buffalo, New York, was in operation from 1901 to 1938.]

Another thing that was sort of different in those days was--now, we get our milk in the supermarket--in those days, there was a dairy over in Roseland, Becker's Farm, and we got our milk from them. I don't remember whether it was every morning or every second morning, the milk wagon would come by. This was a horse-drawn wagon. The milkman would walk to the front stoop and put it in a little box at the front door. In the wintertime, when there was a real bad snowstorm, instead of a wagon, a horse was drawing a sled. So, that's the way our milk was delivered.

We had a coal-fired furnace for many of my early years, before it was converted to gas. In those early days of coal, I can remember the coal truck coming up the street, and two fellows with big canvas bags would carry the coal to the house and pour it into a chute that would go down to the basement to the coal storage bin. I can remember my father shoveling the coal into the furnace. [It was] just a different kind of life and so different from today. I think you want to go ahead and maybe move us into days in Korea or Austria.

SI: I want to talk about Austria. You had been in training assignments at places like Fort Belvoir and out in the Midwest. What was it like preparing to go overseas to Europe, and what was your assignment going to be when you got to Austria?

RC: Okay. When I left the States on a troopship, I did not know what my assignment was going to be. I sort of thought it would be in Germany; that's where most of the bases were, even today, I guess. In any event, I got on the ship. My wife was quite pregnant at that time and therefore could not join me. However, there were a number of classmates from my West Point Class of '48 on the ship and, in many cases, wives were along. So, it was an enjoyable trip across the Atlantic.

We steamed into Bremerhaven, and almost immediately, I don't remember exactly the timing, but there was a telegram from Montclair saying that my wife had delivered and I was the father of a baby girl. So, very happy news upon my arrival there. At Bremerhaven, we got orders, and I got mine and they said, "Report to U.S. Forces Austria in Salzburg." I must say, most of my classmates opened their orders and they were to stations in Germany. As I recall, I think it was perhaps four or five of my classmates who went down to Austria.

We got on a train and went down to Salzburg and reported into headquarters to find out what our specific assignments were. Mine was to something called the 70th Engineer Combat Battalion, which was in a town very close to Linz. This was, I'm trying to think, maybe seventy or eighty miles east of Salzburg. At that time, Austria was divided into four zones, the American zone, British zone, French zone and Russian zone. Linz was right on the Danube River, which was the border between the American and Russian zones. So, I reported to headquarters there and was told that I was going to be commander of the second platoon of B Company. They did tell me right off the bat that this was a very nice assignment and that my platoon had been elected to participate in some maneuvers that were going to happen in the very near future with the French Army down in the French zone of Austria. My initial assignment was to get my platoon ready for the maneuvers and make sure they make a good showing. [Editor's Note: In 1938, Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in what is known as the *Anschluss*. After World War II, Austria was divided into four zones and occupied by the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and France. In 1955, occupying troops were withdrawn and Austria gained independence.]

I was introduced to my platoon. I was very, very fortunate that my platoon sergeant, a fellow named Valent, V-A-L-E-N-T, would be my head NCO [noncommissioned officer]. He was a staff sergeant. He had served in World War II in the infantry and had worked his way up the enlisted ranks to being, I guess he'd been a tech sergeant, I'm not sure, but almost all the way up the enlisted ranks by the end of the war. When the war was over, he wanted to get into the engineers and transferred. He took a break, I think, maybe down to corporal, I'm not sure. He lost his stripes and started training as an engineer NCO, and by the time I caught up to him, he was a platoon sergeant. A very rough looking guy, well spoken, but a guy who obviously had complete control not only over what he was doing in the engineers but over the forty men in my platoon. So, that was my initial assignment. I honestly don't remember the timeframe here, but we had several weeks of training before we actually went down to the Innsbruck area for our maneuvers.

One of the big things that we had, which was sort of a new piece of equipment in the battalion and something that Sergeant Valent really was not familiar with, was something called an M4A2 floating bridge. This was a rubber ponton sort of thing with a steel superstructure. Before we got involved in it, the sergeant had made himself very much acquainted with the bridge and how to put it together. So, we trained quite a bit on going through the exercise initially on land and then locally on a small river on putting this thing together. Then, shortly thereafter, we went on maneuvers. It [was] a really great experience living in a pup tent and getting to know the French Army and all that. Let's see, what else should I say about that?

SI: I wanted to ask, a lot of the folks who I interview that either went through the academies or Officer Candidate School or ROTC all mention that you learn from your first few sergeants or

definitely from the sergeant in your first command. It seems like you had a lot of respect for your sergeant. Would you say that you learned a lot about command from him?

RC: Yes, very definitely. He set an excellent standard on how to treat the enlisted subordinates, so I learned that from him. Well, let me say one thing about him in connection with a move we made. Fairly early in the game, we were stationed at Camp McCauley, close by Linz, as I mentioned, for a matter of a very few months, and then my platoon was assigned down to a small mountain village called Zell am See. This was about fifty miles due south of Salzburg in just beautiful alpine country. Our quarters were in an old hotel that had been taken over by the Army. One thing that Sergeant Valent did very early in the game was to find some old cans of paint, and they did a wonderful job with the platoon in fixing up our quarters where they were staying in the hotel. [Editor's Note: Camp McCauley was a United States Army installation located near Linz in Hörsching, Austria.]

At the same time, also a little bit about my family. My family had joined me four months after the birth of my [child]. So, I first saw my daughter at four months. She flew into the airbase there at Frankfurt. So, I drove up there and saw my wife after four months and my new daughter. We stayed that first night with a classmate of mine who was stationed close by in Frankfurt with an engineer outfit up that way. By that time, I had gotten my car. I had bought a 1948 Chevrolet [Bel] Air sedan when I was a first classman, and I had made arrangements to ship it over. I went to Bremerhaven to pick it up. So, I had it, and that's the way we drove back with the new baby. Initially, we didn't have quarters except in a hotel. That was just for a very few weeks, and then we were assigned quarters. Actually, it was a Nazi airfield close by the town of Zell am See, but it had been converted into quarters for officers.

The platoon was billeted there in Zell am See, and after the maneuvers, we had lots of exercises in the local area. As far as chronology is concerned, this of course was before Korea broke out. I must say the whole attitude was one of worrying about Russia. The attitude in Germany was they had a lot of field exercises out at Grafenwoehr, the big field training exercise area up there, and there was that worry of what might happen with Russia. So, that was the background of our training that something could happen. [Editor's Note: The Korean War occurred from 1950 to 1953.]

SI: Were you near where the Russians were occupying in Austria?

RC: Yes. Camp McCauley was just across the river from the Russian zone. The system at that time, although the French and British zones were quite open and you could travel wherever you wanted, the Russian zone was quite limited. In getting from Linz, you went across the Danube Bridge; immediately, you were in the Russian zone and went through a checkpoint. You had to stay on a single highway getting to Vienna. Now, Vienna was in the center of the Russian zone, but it was a four-nation divided city, so that there [were] French, British, American and Russian zones within Vienna. But to get there, you had to stay on the highway. Although we saw a great deal of particularly the French troops, we saw virtually none of what was going on in the Russian zone. [Editor's Note: Like the rest of Austria, the capital city Vienna was divided into four zones by Allied forces at the end of World War II.]

My wife and I got there probably three times, and we were tourists getting to know Vienna, a lovely city at that time. In order to find goods, nice things for the house, we did most of that shopping up in Munich in the German American zone, not in Vienna.

SI: How long ...

RC: To answer your question on how close we were, we were close to them but saw virtually none of them as a military force.

SI: Was it difficult for troops and families there in terms of having to go to Munich to get things, or was there enough infrastructure around to keep you supplied with what you needed?

RC: If you're talking about things like groceries and clothing, supplies and that sort of thing, no, we were not at all dependent upon going to a large city for that. What I mentioned, initially, my wife was in a hotel. My wife and baby were in a hotel in Linz. Afterwards, she was in this hotel in Zell am See, and there, there was a dining room with service, facilities and that sort of thing. We had our meals there. Also, my wife is a very good linguist. She had studied a lot of French and also [spent] about a year in her college years in Geneva, where all of her classes were in French. She was a French linguist. She very quickly picked up German, and she could buy in the local groceries in Zell am See and get extra things that we needed. So, there was an infrastructure, very definitely, for things that the military needed.

SI: After the maneuvers, what was a typical day like for you and your unit? What would you do? You said you would sometimes do exercises. What would a typical day be like?

RC: One thing my platoon was involved in from Zell am See, it wasn't too many months after these maneuvers that a new camp was opened up about, I would say, ten or twelve miles north of Zell am See, a little town, Saalfelden. A very large camp infrastructure was put together for, well, it wasn't primarily for the engineers, but primarily for the 350th Infantry Regiment, which was the major U.S. combat force in Austria at the time. We got involved in some of the building of the tent camp there. There was an old German caserne, so there were wooden structures, but a much larger tent camp that was for American troops. My platoon was involved in preparing that camp and doing work up at Saalfelden. Let's see, what else I can say? I'm trying to think specifically about a typical day and that sort of thing. [Editor's Note: A caserne refers to military barracks.]

SI: Another thing I have heard in this kind of occupation or long-term deployments is it was difficult to keep up morale, or part of the job is to keep people busy, keep them entertained. Was that a significant part of the challenge of your job?

RC: There was a program of athletic sorts of things. They did have baseball teams. One thing I got involved in was skiing. Skiing was a recreational activity but also was important in the military. For a while there at Saalfelden, I was assigned to organize and run a ski school, and this was not a large operation. I think the number of people we had was less than a platoon, so this was in the order of fifteen to twenty soldiers that we taught basic running on skis and also tactics on skis. To answer your question, that also was a recreational sort of thing that people did

in the area. For the enlisted people, there was a PX [Post Exchange]. I'm trying to think about organized activities for them, and I really can't recall much about that sort of thing, other than involvement in basketball teams and that sort of thing.

SI: Were there ever any times where you were concerned about the Russians or any kind of alerts, that sort of thing?

RC: No. When we get to Korea, I'll talk about alerts there. I don't remember any threat of any kind of activity across the border and that sort of thing. Although there was the concern about what might happen, it never reached the point of actual alerts and concern that we were going to be involved.

SI: Did you have much interaction with the locals, the Austrians?

RC: Yes, very much so. All of the time that my family was there, we did have an Austrian maid, and she was a live-in maid and lived with us and took care of our infant daughter. This was probably one reason why my wife learned German so quickly because she had to interact with the maid. But, also, we got to know people in town. We did skiing on the local hill, and I got to know people there. I got to know a fellow who ran a local bar there, and it wasn't so much the bar relationship but the fact that he was interested in skiing. He had a son who did a lot of ski touring--ski climbing is more descriptive rather than ski touring. While I was there, I took a couple of trips with him to high mountain huts, and we'd use skins on the bottom of our skis for climbing and then had the pleasure of skiing down. One of these was an overnight sort of thing. We climbed up to the ski hut, and we spent the night and then skied down. So, that was one example of getting very close to an Austrian-speaking friend. There was a fair amount of interchange with the Austrian populace in the towns of Zell am See and Saalfelden. Also, one thing, as we talked to them about the war, and the war had been fairly recent, and talked to men who had been in the service in the Austrian Army, it was very difficult to find anyone who had fought on the Western Front. I don't know whether this was true or not, but all of them seemed to have fought on the Eastern Front against the Russians and not against the American and British forces in the west.

SI: At that time, could you still see a lot of destruction from the war or the impact of the war?

RC: Yes, very definitely. I went over in '49, so it was four years later. In Austria, but particularly in Germany, many of the Autobahn bridges across ravines were still down. You saw the concrete structure there in the ravine underneath and, in the meantime, a temporary circular road going around and getting up to the other side. I must say, the cities still were in quite bad shape. Munich still had a lot of damaged buildings and, in some cases, very little sign of construction. A lot of work still had to be done. That was true too of other more northern cities that we visited. The late war was very much affecting the economy, and there was something called displaced persons, people who had been displaced during the war and had been in camps and had not yet found their lives again. Quite a black market too. I hate to admit it, but it was very common and I was a part of it. You go across the German border and go up to Munich and dealing in the black market there and bring silverware and artwork and other things that we could find at quite a good price. It was taking a chance. There was always a chance that you would

get stopped by the MPs [Military Police], but we took that chance. I'm not sure how long that black market went on, but it was definitely in full swing still in '49-'50. [Editor's Note: Autobahn refers to the German highway system.]

SI: Were there other projects that your unit worked on, aside from the camp for the infantry regiment?

RC: In addition to the initial maneuvers, the field exercise that I spoke of, there were periodic field exercises like that where we were supporting the 350th Infantry units in simulated river crossing operations and planting explosives, dummy explosives, on bridges and all of that. So, I must say there was a lot of attention to getting ready for being in the field with infantry units.

SI: You got there in what month in '49?

RC: I probably went over in August of '49.

SI: Did the Korean War start while you were in Austria?

RC: Very definitely, yes. This happened the following June of 1950. That, of course, was a big and a very surprise event, and so there was much conjecture about what this would mean in our assignments. Basically, we had been sent over there on three-year assignments. Now, it became evident fairly early in the game that anyone who was in the service stationed in Hawaii or Okinawa or anywhere in the Pacific or Japan was very quickly going to be involved in Korea. I don't remember that there were any promises made, but I think it became evident that basically large units in Germany and Austria were going to stay there. Although this was not a Russian war, I think there was the fear that Russia might take advantage of our involvement over in the Far East and do something in Europe. So, there wasn't any great siphoning off of troops from Europe to Korea. No fear on my part that I was going to go in that direction.

SI: Was your three-year tour curtailed at all?

RC: No, it wasn't. We were left there for the full three years. I'll tell you one effect Korea had on the nature of troops in Europe. We started to get some officers in the unit who had served in World War II. They had been let go in '46 or so and had started raising their families and had started their civilian jobs, and then they were called back in and assigned to Europe. Now, of course, many of them went to the Far East. It was strange to talk to them and see what their attitudes were about their call back in. We young officers who hadn't had the World War II experience really, I think, appreciated our assignments and thought it was a big adventure and all of that. The World War II officers had sort of a different attitude that here they were, granted it was a beautiful country and all of that, but their normal lives had been interrupted and they did not really appreciate it. They were very capable officers but not with the same attitude toward their service.

SI: Did you remain with the same platoon and unit throughout, or did you go up to a different level at any point?

RC: Yes, I was promoted to first lieutenant shortly after I arrived over there. I guess it was six months into my tour or something like that. I'm trying to think how long I was platoon commander, probably a year or so, something like that. Then, I was assigned as battalion motor officer, an assignment that I didn't particularly enjoy. We had a fleet of many two-and-a-half ton trucks and three-quarter-ton utility vehicles and lots of Jeeps. I was responsible for the motor pool and making sure that they were fit for service. I had a very capable motor sergeant, fortunately, and a lot of the work was done right there in Zell am See or later--I'm trying to think if that overlapped with Saalfelden. We had our shop, but more serious vehicular problems had to be taken to a larger facility in Salzburg. I think that was probably for seven or eight months, something like that.

Then, I later became assistant operations officer. This was on the battalion staff in Saalfelden. To me, a very interesting assignment. I was assigned reporting to the operations officer, who had World War II service and a very good officer, somewhat easygoing. [There were] interesting things to do in overseeing training in the battalion and also looking after field exercises that that battalion had. That was mostly when we were in Saalfelden. I guess I was in that assignment when I was transferred back to the U.S. States in the summer of '52. In general, I had very enjoyable assignments in Austria, and it was not the high point of my career but a great place to be.

SI: What would you say was the biggest challenge you faced in any of these capacities in Austria?

RC: I think the most direct responsibility was as platoon leader. In the other assignments, I was not the head man. Now, a platoon is not a large operation. It's just forty men, but I would say that's the most challenging thing I had, not only in determining with my platoon sergeant how the day was going to lay out, overseeing it, but also giving the men a sense that I knew what I was doing, that they had to do what was right and do it in a good way. I must say we had our disciplinary problems. In a situation like that, well, I don't know how common it is, but drinking is always a problem. So, there were problems of drinking at the wrong time or in excess and then working with the platoon sergeant on what punishment was in order. Despite the fact that I'd had very good academic training at West Point and the regular Army training at Fort Riley and Belvoir, it was still a challenge to have the men right in front of me and to lead them day to day.

SI: When you came back to the United States, what was your next assignment?

RC: I came back to the States, and I'm trying to think at what point I received my orders. I think I must have been on leave in Montclair. We came back to the States, and then I got my assignment to Fort Lewis, Washington. This was to something called the 9th Engineer Combat Battalion. We drove across the country with our two young children. I had mentioned that we had shipped over my Chevrolet to Austria. I sold it over there and bought something called a Morris Oxford, a very small sedan. So, we drove this small sedan with the two kids across the country to Fort Lewis.

I reported to the battalion headquarters, and I was assigned as communications officer for the battalion, a new mission for me. I quickly got acquainted with radio equipment and that sort of thing that was used by the battalion. The battalion was in a training mode, and it wasn't a full-strength battalion. I got to learn Morse code and some of the things that weren't completely necessary but were nice to know with this communication equipment. I did not find it a particularly challenging assignment, and I was happy when it was over.

It was over a little bit quicker than it might have been. I don't know whether I mentioned this name or not before, but one of my very close friends from the Academy was Joe Bratton. We had both been assigned to the same battalion and were fellow platoon commanders in the 70th Engineers, a very, very close friend, a wonderful officer. We both found ourselves out at--I'm trying to think whether he was at Lewis--but we did a lot of talking about where our careers were going. As I say, Korea had broken out, and we were talking about where we were in the service four years in and the fundamental problem of whether we were going to stick with the regular Army or if we were going to get out. I think we both were thinking somewhat the same way: If we were going to stay in the service, I think we felt that we had to get to Korea and get that on our record. Many of our classmates were over there in combat assignments and getting this on their records, and here we are in several peacetime situations. On the other hand, if we were going to get out, and that was in our minds, at least as a possibility, I think we were looking ahead and thinking that we're going to feel much better about ourselves if we had gotten over there before we left the service. So, we volunteered to get over to the Far East. We both were shipped over about at the same time. So, I [sent] my family back home and went over there in March of 1953--this was toward the very tail end of the war, which wound up in July. So, I sent my family back home and went over by plane, a twenty-four-hour trip from the West Coast via the Aleutians to Tokyo. [Editor's Note: The armistice to signal the cessation of hostilities in the Korean War went into effect on July 27, 1953. Mr. Conover served in Korea from March 1953 to July 1954.]

SI: How did your family react when you told them you had volunteered for Far East service?

RC: [My wife] had not been brought up in any way close to the military. Her only connection was when I went to West Point and, of course, becoming an Army wife. But she was a very, very good Army wife and very much a part of military culture and atmosphere. I think she understood completely. Many of her high school and college friends had gotten married and had gotten started in civilian life, and she was seeing what they were doing and I think was certainly attracted to that. I never felt any pressure, "Roger, let's get out," and join her friends in Montclair or Westchester or wherever they were. So, she appreciated it. She stayed with her parents in Montclair, and they helped her look after the kids. My parents, at that time, were close by in the same town, so they saw quite a bit of both my wife and the kids, which was nice.

SI: You were in Tokyo in March of '53, or had you been shipped over to Korea by then?

RC: Well, no, I went immediately from--we landed in Tokyo and then went up to--I'm trying to think where I got my orders. But, anyhow, I got my orders and traveled by--where would I have gotten my orders? In any event, I picked up my sidearm, my pistol, and I guess I went by Jeep up to my unit. I'm trying to think where the battalion headquarters were at that point. I was

assigned as company commander of B Company, 14th Engineer Combat Battalion. Most divisions have an engineer combat battalion assigned to them, along with infantry and artillery and that sort of thing. This battalion was assigned to a group. That is, it wasn't associated with a specific division, and geographically it was not close to any of the other companies in the group. I'm trying to recall the geography of where I got my orders and all of that. In any event, I reported to the company, which was in a little town well north of Seoul, but not up on the main front. I think in miles we were probably six or seven miles back from the front. I reported to my unit, and I had four lieutenants who had been there a matter of months. At least they had some experience with the unit. [It was] a company with a good sergeant major and, I would say, a rather well-trained combat company.

We were outside a little town initially for just a matter of weeks and then were deployed to a different town and therefore had the problem of setting up a new company area and that became an initial--well, not a side issue, but something we spent a fair amount of time on aside from our regular unit duties. That involved putting up our squad tents and company headquarters and company kitchen and all of those things and making provisions for the company trucks and motor pool and all of that.

The fundamental mission of the company was in maintaining the main supply route that was in that part of the war zone--we were in the sector of the 1st British Commonwealth Division. We were in a non-American unit area. That involved--I don't know how many miles of road there were; there were probably, I would say, twenty-five to thirty miles of road and a major river crossing on the main supply route. We were responsible for the maintenance of that highway, assuring that it was operable in all weather.

The river crossing--a couple of things. For a while, during the year, we had a floating ponton bridge there. At other times of the year, when the weather was not good, and the ponton bridge was in danger of being taken away, we had a floating ferry. This was made out of, once again, the same sort of pontons, but rather than being twenty or twenty-five pontons going across, this was two or three pontons supporting, once again, this steel bulk and enough room for ferrying--I guess we were able to take two or three two-and-a-half-ton trucks or ambulances or whatever we'd have to be ferrying across. My company was responsible for that river crossing as well as the maintenance of the highway.

Now, for a lot of the work on the highway, we had the support of--we called them KSCs. They were Korean Service Corps people, and they were in uniform in the Korean Army but not armed. They were civilian laborers. We got assigned to my company a couple hundred of them, and they had their own area where they lived. But, then, during the day, we hooked up with them and were responsible for the work that they did on the road system. They were involved in making sure that the drainage system of the roads--we were involved primarily for the surface of the road--but they were for the gutters and they were working with their shovels. It was just hard, hard work keeping the roads in shape. The maintenance of the surface of the road, this was involved in surface material that was laid down. Our two-and-a-half-ton trucks would lay the surface down, and then it would be spread by hand on the surface and provide a protection against washout. The KSCs, of course, were involved in that too. I should say something about that material that was put on the road surface. It was called decomposed granite, and this was

mined out of the quarry by a bulldozer and then loaded on to the trucks and then brought to our road sites and put on the surface. So, the company also was involved in the operation of the quarry and had bulldozers and other material-handling equipment. [Editor's Note: The Korean Service Corps (KSC), first called the Civilian Transportation Corps, was established in 1951 to provide logistical support for American and international forces during the Korean War. It still exists today in support of American and South Korean forces.]

SI: Was this an area that was subject to air attacks or even shelling?

RC: No, it was not. As I say, the frontline was several miles [away], and we were never subject to air attack. The front was the subject of a lot of artillery shelling, and the front had settled down into a fairly stable trench system and shelling from trench to trench, but nothing back in our area. We could see at night the flashes in the air and all that, but we were never subject to air attack. We did have periodic alerts but never had any actual air attacks. We were never shelled, except at the very end of the war. There was some shelling just at the armistice. It was to show that they knew where we were. They were shelling very close to the ferry site.

SI: What were the living conditions like for you and your men?

RC: Yes. I haven't said anything about my platoon lieutenants, [who were] capable officers. Actually, I was in a company tent initially, all of the officers in a single large tent. Our meals were not in a tent, but we would go to the company mess in the company area. I'm trying to think what I should say about sanitation and that sort of thing, brushing our teeth and going to the head, that sort of thing. It was basically the company officers all together in the same tent.

SI: What other challenges were there in maintaining the road? It sounds like weather was a significant issue.

RC: Well, it became a significant issue when the weather was bad. There were major: not only washouts, but also the substructure of the road was such that there would be tremendous potholes. The road would just give way. The substructure of the road would be frozen and then melt when the weather was warm and then just drop. Part of it was digging out and filling in these bad sections. We did have road graders, which would grade the road and this decomposed granite, smooth it and that sort of thing. There was major flooding, which would destroy a section of the road and [it would] have to be rebuilt.

SI: Did you have much interaction with the Commonwealth Forces?

RC: No, not really. Other than seeing their vehicles on the road and ferrying their vehicles across the river, not really, no. We did have, there was something called the Queen's birthday celebration in April. This would have been April of '54 after the end of the war. I think this is probably typical of British Commonwealth Forces throughout the world, but they celebrate the Queen's birthday. So, we went over to the Commonwealth division sector, and they had a major parade in honor of the Queen. Units of the U.S. Army did participate in that and many of the Queen's infantry, artillery, armored units paraded. Our officers went over and observed it. We were not part of the parade, but [it was] a big celebration. We got a sense of the discipline in the

British forces and all that. Quite an adventure. [Editor's Note: Queen Elizabeth II, who was born on April 21, 1926, ascended to the throne on February 6, 1952 and was coronated on June 2, 1953. She passed away at the age of ninety-six on September 8, 2022. Two birthday celebrations took place every year during her reign: on Queen Elizabeth's actual birthday and then usually on the second Saturday in June.]

SI: It sounds like even though you got there in March, the cold weather was still a big issue.

RC: Yes, it definitely was. I'm trying to think whether we ever actually had to suspend operations for the weather. I don't think we ever did. I don't think the amount of snow was ever that great. There was certainly a lot of cold weather work and effect on the road system.

SI: What do you recall about the time of the armistice going into effect?

RC: Well, it was a big sigh of relief in the battalion. I don't recall a party celebrating the affair at that time, but it did affect greatly what we were doing. I'm trying to think of the timing of when I left the company and was assigned to the battalion staff. But, in any event, it affected greatly what the battalion assignments were, the work they got involved with. There was something called the Armed Forces Aid to Korea program, which started shortly after the armistice. It involved aid to the Korean people in rebuilding their superstructure and schools and churches and that sort of thing. Our battalion got involved in that in not only designing but also building these structures and overseeing the structure of things in the battalion area. My assignment after leaving the company was on the battalion staff as operations officer, so I was at the center of that AFAK program for our unit. [Editor's Note: The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953. AFAK refers to the Armed Forces Assistance to Korea.]

SI: How effective do you think the program was?

RC: I think it was very effective in building relationships with the Korean people, and I think it was very, very worthwhile. Our battalion got involved in this construction of military things really in the area of I Corps, and I Corps requested and got the assistance of our unit in helping to build their headquarters. This, once again, involved not only tent structures, but also a chapel there at I Corps headquarters.

SI: You mentioned that before going over, you and your friend were thinking about careers and what you might do. How did your thinking change particularly over your time in Korea?

RC: Well, I would say it developed. As I say, we went over at the same time. Joe was assigned to the 1st Engineer Combat Battalion, which was a division kind of unit, and that was up near the frontlines, as far as the engineers went. He had assignments much closer to the front than I was. We kept in touch during all the time we were over there, and after the armistice, we got together a couple of times. I went by Jeep to where he was, and so I walked around the positions up there and saw the bunker and trench system and all of that. He had a much more exciting few months before the armistice than I did. But that was the occasion for developing our thoughts about how we felt.

The armistice had come, and we looked ahead to what might be coming. We knew we were going back to the States in a few months. I don't know at what point, but shortly before the end of our tour, we both had decided that we would leave the service. We both put in our papers to Washington to leave the service. I don't recall what month we got the word, probably in June of 1954, that our request had been honored and that we would leave the service shortly thereafter. We knew we were going back to our families, but we didn't know what would follow after that.

SI: How did you decide what to do next in your career?

RC: I felt I wanted to use my engineering training in some way. I'm not sure how much. I was interested in corporate life. I'd seen a lot of my high school friends get into corporations and enjoy that sort of life. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I went back to Montclair and started looking. I'm trying to think how I made my initial contacts, but I had some initial contacts with engineering consulting firms and that sort of thing. Actually, I had a job offer with an outfit, and in the meantime, I heard about a training program with Bell Laboratories. This was part of the Bell system, and I heard that they had started a training program in New York City. I made contact and went into the city and was interviewed. I got a job offer from them and told the other outfit that I would not join them. [Editor's Note: Bell Laboratories was founded as Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1925 and became AT&T Bell Laboratories (1984-1996), Bell Labs Innovations (1996-2007), and Nokia Bell Labs (2016-present). Bell Laboratories was originally headquartered in New York City, before relocating in 1967 to Murray Hill, New Jersey, with multiple sites in New Jersey and other states.]

I'm trying to think of the exact timing, probably in September of 1954, initially, I was probably commuting from my folks' house. I'm trying to think if we were living with my wife's family initially or in my folks' house in Montclair, but we quickly decided that we would be in a position to buy our own house and started looking for a home and found one in Montclair and put down a down payment and moved in, in the fall of 1954.

We should talk a little about the job. This was with Bell Laboratories. Bell Laboratories was the R&D [research and development] end of the Bell System. Our headquarters were at 463 West Street in Manhattan. The training program had been started a year before, so there were probably a half a dozen fellows who had joined the program. I joined a new cohort of six or seven fellows. In general, these were men who had graduated from college and in general had taken an MBA [Master of Business Administration] course. They were basically my age, a little bit younger. Some of them had just gotten out of an MBA program. We were under the tutelage of a wonderful fellow who was assigned as coordinator of the management staff training program.

The program involved two years of assignments, six months each, to elements of the staff part of Bell Laboratories. This would involve personnel, accounting, staff operations, that is, the actual plant operations, general support, secretaries and clerks and that sort of thing. [It was] six-month assignments at each of these areas and then starting your assignment to a particular department. Art Daley, the fellow who ran this operation, had each of us under his wing, and once a week, we would assemble at West Street, meet as a group, and talk about the Laboratories, the Bell System, its history and what its operations were, and in more detail about Bell Laboratories. [It

was] an opportunity to get to know the organization, and then we'd go our separate ways to wherever we might be assigned. I'm trying to think how long our meetings were, whether it was half a day or two hours or something like that at West [Street], and then we would go to our office, whatever our assignment [was].

These six-month assignments were, I would say, to get each of us acquainted with what goes on in each of the departments, rather than involving any particular duty. For example, when I went through the accounting department in New York, the accounting department had many, many facets. This was a question of spending a day or two with each supervisor, understanding what sort of business goes across his or her shelf and what sort of paperwork was involved, the relationships with adjoining sections in the department. My assignment to plant operations, I would bounce around from supervisor to supervisor, understanding what facet of the operation of the plant he was responsible for, what his duties were, and what his problems were and that sort of thing, without being assigned any particular duties. It was a very thorough job of getting acquainted with what was happening in each facet of staff operations. One of these was general methods.

We had general executive instructions, which was a very large bible of how the business was to be run, and there was one department that was responsible for putting these instructions together. I will say that in that department, each of us who were assigned as trainees would be given an assignment such as, "Make contact with this department and see how the instructions should be changed," and that sort of thing. But that was unusual. On most of them, it was strictly getting acquainted with the work.

That was over after two years, and we were ready for our first real assignment. My first assignment was to labor relations. There was a very small labor relations department in Bell Labs. Labor relations was not a big thing. Most of the staff was professional, but there were a large number of shop sort of people. At Murray Hill, we had a shop of all sorts of instrument and toolmakers and non-technical maintenance people who were unionized, and so there were union-represented people, a labor contract and a director of labor relations. This was not large. I was assigned as an assistant, and it was very, very interesting probably for a year or so. I operated as secretary to the labor relations committee, and when we had bargaining with the union committee, I would take notes and write the minutes. I found it very, very interesting and an opportunity to deal with the union-represented people.

SI: Was that the electrical workers union?

RC: No, it was a unit of the CWA, Communications Workers of America.

SI: After that assignment, where were you assigned?

RC: Then, I received my first responsible staff position. At each of the major Bell Labs locations, they had a staff director, and he had a staff for the operation of the plant and its support. So, there was a director, and he had three department heads. I was appointed general services manager under this director. So, this was a fairly responsible job, I would say. I was very happy to get the assignment, and I had four supervisors under me who had people, not only

secretaries and clerks, but storekeepers. We had cases where engineers could buy stuff outside that they could store inside the laboratories, and we had storekeepers who looked after these operations. I'm trying to think of other operations that were under this. In any event, I had supervisors reporting to me, and I was responsible for the operation of this unit.

For me, this involved problems of personnel, that is, when my department had openings, I was involved in the selection and appointment of subordinates, salary reviews of people working in these organizations, day-to-day problems in our support of the very important technical staff. So, it was important that we keep the technical staff happy and provided with the support they needed. This had to do in part with, say, the number of secretaries they might have. In those days, this was before anybody had any kind of computer, so each technical department had a secretary, and how these secretaries were deployed, how many, and clerical support for the operation were all part of my problem.

The staff director, we were very close to him, the three department heads, and we would have lunch with him and periodic staff meetings working out problems among the departments. That was probably for a year or so. All of my subordinates were at Murray Hill.

Then, for another year or two, I was in charge of plant operations. This is more of the nuts and bolts of running the building, not the staff people who provide clerical support and that sort of thing, but rather the actual operation of the plant itself. So, that involved, among other things, the guard force, the janitorial crew, the steam plant. I'm trying to think of all the things that were involved in this, the things involved in running the Murray Hill plant.

SI: Approximately how many people were involved in that?

RC: I think 150 or so, something like that. Also under this was plant engineering. This involved the engineering of changes in the physical structure. That is, when people needed a new laboratory or new office, it might involve changing the walls and also the services involved in providing it. I'm thinking of electrical services and water services and that sort of thing. All of this was in the plant engineering department.

SI: Was this in the later '50s that we are talking about at this point?

RC: Yes, this was 1955, '6, '7. In 1958, I was assigned as general services manager at a branch laboratory. I'm not sure whether we've talked about branch laboratories, but in addition to the major laboratories--by this time, New York had closed down--the headquarters were Murray Hill, New Jersey, a major laboratory at Whippany, and then a newly-constructed laboratory down in Holmdel, New Jersey. We had eight branch laboratories primarily in the East and Midwest that provided the engineering of equipment that was then manufactured by Western Electric, at a major factory facility at that particular location.

What happened was, for any new equipment that was being designed at Bell Laboratories, the final engineering was done at a branch laboratory, which is at the location of the manufacturer. The manufacture of Bell equipment involving semiconductors was done at Allentown, so the

engineering of that, the final engineering, was done by Bell Laboratories there. So, we supported the work there.

At branch laboratories, the arrangement of staff support for the technical work was a little bit different. The meat of the work was done by Western Electric people under the supervision of our Bell Laboratories people. I had a staff of Bell Laboratories people who were supervising Western Electric people. I'm trying to think how many people I had there. I want to say a hundred or so. The supervisors were Bell Laboratories, and their subordinates were Western Electric people. This involved all of the staff support for the technical people at Allentown. [It was] a pretty responsible job and one involving liaison and cooperation with the technical director there. There was a Bell Laboratories head man there with his own departments, and so my responsibility was to make sure that his people had the support they needed. This involved, once again, primarily secretarial, clerical and shop support.

There was a laboratory subordinate to Allentown at Laureldale, about an hour west, near Reading. It's called the Reading Laboratory, and once again, I had a supervisor there with staff support for the Reading Laboratory.

SI: How long were you at that facility?

RC: That was for a couple years. In the meantime, we sold our house in Montclair and moved to a small town, Emmaus, outside of Bethlehem. We bought a house there and sent my two kids to school there. I'm trying to think of chronology here. Actually, by that time, I had had another couple of children, so they were sort of infants when we were in [Emmaus and I worked at the] Allentown Laboratory. We're in 1958. I was brought back to New Jersey in 1960 and became a director of the branch laboratories. So, I had these eight branch laboratories under me but was actually stationed at Murray Hill.

SI: Would you have to go around to the different facilities?

RC: Yes, I would have to visit them periodically and see what their problems were: questions of personnel relations with technical staff. We would meet, I would get them all together once every six months or so. We would have a one-day meeting and a chance to socialize together in the evening and talk about [work], play cards together, and understand each other's problems and that sort of thing. That was for a couple years.

SI: We can put in notes later.

RC: Then, I started a number of years in the role of an assistant to vice president. This is a position that is filled by a staff person like myself who is assigned to a technical vice president. The vice president is spending most of his time and effort in planning and overseeing the meat of Bell Labs' technical work underneath him, and he normally has three or four what are known as executive directors overseeing a particular area of the work the VP is responsible for. A VP might be responsible for research or transmission development or systems development: major elements of Bell Laboratories' work. He does not want to spend his time and effort in worrying about the people who are supporting his technical people. For that reason, he has an assistant

who is really the liaison between himself, his technical people and the staff people who are doing their work.

That was my role in being an assistant to vice president. My first assignment to a VP was down at Holmdel. I elected not to pick up my family and move down there. It was an hour commute by car. We had a car-pool arrangement, a couple of other staff people that commuted too, so that wasn't any major problem. So, the whole organization was at Holmdel. I worked for him for a couple of years, and I must say he was quite a tough executive. I think his executive directors felt that and they really had to toe the line and do what he told and make sure the work was done, and I felt somewhat the same way under his command.

I was involved in making sure that his people had the right staff support, would solve problems where that might fall short, and assisted in salary reviews for his people. This involved organizing the actual review, assembling the paperwork involved, and putting stuff up on the board, if that was necessary, and being present for the review. There was a system of ranking people on the board. This was not a big responsibility but just making the changes on the board and moving people around. Then, implementing the review with the personnel department. Also, [I was] involved in the physical problems of when a technical manager needed a change in his laboratory, that is, something would come up in the way of a new project. A supervisor would have something that involved new equipment, instruments and that sort of thing, working with the staff of the department that I might have been in and making sure that the engineering was done for the space and the work was done with the plant department. So, that was for a couple of years.

Then, I came back and took a similar position for the systems engineering vice president at Whippany, and so it was the same sort of thing. He was a different kind of executive and much more laid back, extremely capable technically, but not as much on top of things and really a brain-centered sort of person and maybe needed a little bit of handholding on staff operations and administrative matters.

I was with Don Ling for about a year and then was assigned to another vice president, Brock McMillan. The operation that Don Ling had was military systems engineering, a small segment of the military work. The bulk of such work was under Brock McMillan. He had an operation that was primarily at Whippany but also had operations at far-flung places like White Sands, New Mexico, and out at the proving grounds in the Pacific. Most of his operation was at Whippany. So, I was his assistant for a matter of, I guess, probably three years or so, a wonderful person to work for. Previously, he had left Bell Laboratories and had been on assignment to Washington, so he was working for the Department of Defense there. Very well respected in the military community.

SI: It sounds like your military background came in handy in a lot of these assignments.

RC: Yes, it did. I would say it did, and we could talk somewhat the same language. I would sit in on some of these staff meetings where technical department heads and supervisors would talk about a particular element of their work. I must say that with my background, I could see where this fit into the system, but on the other hand, it was just extremely technical, so I followed it to a

point. Yes, much of the work at this time was involved in missile defense and deeply technical systems to track incoming missiles and fire at them and all that. That's what the proving grounds were all about out in the Pacific and in New Mexico. I never got to get out there myself, but a lot of work was done there.

I did finish up my career with Bell Laboratories as director of security, and that went from a support sort of assignment, where I was working for a VP, to a more operational role, where I was director of security and had more direct responsibilities. Part of it was physical security, the guard forces at our major locations, but it also involved security of military work from the standpoint of what Washington required in relations with the Department of Defense, and the physical spaces that had to be secure. It's not as though I can't say anything about it, but there wasn't too much in those last couple of years of my work there. Then, I retired in 1986.

SI: Give me an overview of what you have done since 1986.

RC: Yes, okay. I've been retired now for thirty-plus years, a very happy time. I haven't talked too much about my personal life. I did lose my first wife to cancer. She was fifty-six at the time and left me with four wonderful children. Then, I did remarry, and I have two stepchildren. In any event, I retired when I was in my new marriage and therefore had a lot of time on my hands. The first year or so, I got involved in doing work with the local center for abused women, and I was in an organization which did a lot of work there supporting the women's shelter. I had a couple of wonderful years of doing physical work there and getting the center in shape for abused women.

Very quickly, sort of on a lark, I took a short modeling course, and for the next fifteen years, I did a lot of modeling, both print work and on camera. I did a lot of video work for J.G. Wentworth. Very enjoyable years going on assignments and working in front of the camera, making some fair amount of money also.

What else should I say about retirement? I'm very active in my church. It's not as though time hangs heavily on my hands. I do a lot of work for the church, and also I'm involved physically playing tennis and playing golf and working in the yard, that sort of thing.

I have four wonderful kids and four grandchildren. We're up to a couple of great grandchildren. I've done a lot of traveling with my second wife, international traveling to France and Germany and Italy and Russia and Spain and Portugal, Egypt. We've put that behind us now, but we saw wonderful parts of the world. I'm very happy with where I am right now. I'm still alive.

SI: Have you stayed involved with any veterans' groups? Do you go to reunions and that sort of thing?

RC: Yes, I am much involved with my Military Academy class. I've been class VP for several years. I've been on the advisory board at West Point for several years representing my class. I go up there a couple of times a year for a board meeting, and I guess I'm more at the center of what the class is doing than anybody else in '48.

The funny thing, I got out early after six years, and I would say, I don't know what the exact percentage is, but two-thirds of my classmates stayed in. I felt sort of out of it and regretted that I wasn't closer to the old school, but I do feel, in the last very few years, that I am doing more for the class and for West Point than anybody else in the class. I've been back every five years for the reunion. Our seventy-fifth reunion is coming up next May, and I'm much at the center of preliminary planning for that. I guess we'll be lucky if we get six or seven or eight at it; that's the way classes are at their seventy-fifth. So, I'm in touch with the class. Most of the few remaining classmates are in the Washington area, and we have gotten together every now and then to renew old times. I feel very good about where I went to school, and I feel closer to it than anybody else at the moment. I regret, Shaun, that my memory has become a little thin on some of these parts, but maybe I can add to it. If that's permissible, I'll do that.

SI: Absolutely. For this session, is there anything else you would like to add or anything that we skipped over that you would like to talk about?

RC: I don't think so, no. Thanks for your patience.

SI: I appreciate all your time in this session and in the past session. It has been really interesting hearing about your experiences.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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